

Letters to The Times

How Cuba Affects West

Britain Sees U.S. Policy Creating Conflict With Our Allies

The writer of the following letter, formerly editor of The Sunday Times of London, has published essays and articles on the Cuban crisis.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

Among the will by-products of the Cuban crisis is the rise of serious misunderstanding and conflict between the United States and her Western allies. Conflict would be less likely if misunderstanding were cleared away. This is a two-way process.

Perhaps a British visitor may attempt a clarification from this side. British people generally seem to realize the geographical and strategic significance of Cuba to the United States; they do think that the Americans are over-sensitive of a pro-Communist Government in Cuba. Do not we in Europe live year after year with the Soviet satellite just across the water? That Cuba herself could make war on the United States is ridiculous; whereas, if there were war between the United States and the Soviet Union the status of Cuba would be a trifling matter in a global nuclear holocaust.

Soviet aid to the Castro regime is regarded as the inevitable consequence of American economic pressures; what else would Cuba turn for help when the United States put the financial squeeze on her? The "fishing port" is obviously a pretense, but unless it is to be made a cause belli it must, one would think, be tolerated.

Certainly no excuse is given for interfering with the legitimate trade of third countries. Britain as a great commercial and maritime nation is bound to defend as a vital interest the right of her shipping to pass freely on its lawful occasions—and she views a blockade as lawful only in a state of war, and even then upon conditions.

Sympathy With Castro

Apart from these more sophisticated arguments, there is in Britain a good deal of popular sympathy with Fidel Castro; despite his violent excesses, he is still seen as a hero of the people who overthrew a tyrannous oligarchy. Memories of Suez cast their unhappy shadow. When Britain and France, faced with just such a situation as now confronts the United States, acted against Nasser's Egypt, what kind of support did they get from Washington? The Dulles-Roosevelt chickens are coming home to roost.

All this might seem to add up to a "hands-off Cuba" demand. That would indeed be the attitude of the left in Britain. But, the broad national approach is pragmatic rather than pontifical—namely, that if the United States regards the situation in Cuba as a serious threat to her security, then it is up to her to act to change it smartly and decisively.

Realistic policies of that sort are to be judged, not by their moral content, for they make no moral claims, but by their practical success or failure. Success will be respected; failure will leave the blame undivided. The policies, however, that must certainly be wrong are those of protracted pressure short of war which, without any guarantee of even probability of success, are bound to involve the interests and policies of third parties.

If the United States is not prepared to overthrow Castro by whatever measures are necessary to do so, she must surely accept him and come to terms with him. A middling attitude, "ready to wound but yet afraid to strike," can only create a running sore in the body of Atlantic relations. And in the long run there are much more important things than what happens in Cuba.

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